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ABSTRACT

While the concept of bilingual education is well-intentioned and pragmatic for public schools, it is not well understood by educators who use it. Differences in understanding lead to diverse actions and contribute to the confusion surrounding the concept. Policymakers, theoreticians, researchers, and practitioners each view bilingual education from a different perspective. A survey of elementary school teachers found no consensus on the meaning of the term "bilingual education." The concept, as it is applied in schools, needs to be clarified so that its intention can be fulfilled. The term "bilingual education" should not be used when the more specific term "bilingual curriculum" is more appropriate. "Bilingual curriculum" is the operationalization of the concept of "bilingual education." This distinction could help new teachers deal with the realities of classroom life and inform teachers in their task. Disenchantment with the operationalization of a misunderstood concept and inadequate preparation to deal with its ramifications has led to a shortage of bilingual teachers. Dialogue among educators about the differences between bilingual education and bilingual curriculum could result in more coherent programs, to the educational benefit of all limited- and non-English-speaking students. A 19-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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Bilingual Education , Bilingual Curriculum : A Teacher's Perspective

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The concept of 'bilingual education' is both well-intentioned and pragmatic for public schooling in the United States. It is well-intentioned because it demonstrates a concern for non or limited English speaking children in an English speaking school system. It is pragmatic because current demographics indicate an influx of non or limited English speaking children into the public school systems in the United States. What the concept of 'bilingual education' is not, however, is clearly understood by educators who use the term. They often hold different meanings of the concept and it is meaning or understanding (along with judgment) that forms the basis of action. Differences in understanding lead to diverse actions and are clearly one reason for the confusion surrounding the concept of 'bilingual education'.

Policymakers, theoreticians, researchers and practitioners each view 'bilingual education' from a slightly different perspective. 'Bilingual education' has come to be an emotion-evoking term that includes political, sociological, and cultural aspects. For this reason, a consensual meaning of 'bilingual education' is illusive.

Currently 'bilingual education' encompasses an ideal, programs, and methods of instruction in its common usage. In one sense, owing to the varied meanings associated with 'bilingual education', the concept is as

perplexing as the concept of 'love'. How it is defined is often a function of who is defining it.

Written by a practitioner, this paper has that perspective. The purpose here is to argue for a clarification of the concept of 'bilingual education' as it is applied to schools. To eliminate some confusion, I don't mean that more studies on methods or programs are needed. Rather, practitioners need to understand the meaning, to understand the intention. Is part of 'bilingual education' fluency in English so that children can ultimately "fit in" to the school mainstream and continue their education as English speakers? Or, should practitioners not be concerned about proficiency in English but instead about cognitive development--whatever the language base? What is the intention of the concept? Using it to name an ideal, and programs, and a method of instruction is confusing to those of us most closely associated with classroom learning.

When several elementary school teachers were given a survey concerned with their opinions about certain aspects having to do with 'bilingual education' for data collection for this paper, there was no consensus to the question, "What does 'bilingual education' mean?" Each had a different understanding. (See End Notes). And if this small, and admittedly statistically insignificant sample yielded such diverse results, it is likely that a larger, more statistically significant sample would mirror similar

diversity of opinion when allowed a non-forced choice answer to the same question.

'Bilingual education' is really a theoretical concept, yet it is commonly used in the field of education as both a theoretical and practical concept. 'Bilingual education' is used interchangeably with (at least) the concepts of 'bilingual instruction', 'bilingual curriculum', 'native-language instruction', 'bilingual-bicultural education', 'native language and culture' and even 'ESL' at a school level. Hakuta and Gould (1987) warn, "'bilingual education encompasses a broad range of programs." That statement indicates the spectrum of the concept of 'bilingual education'. The theoretical concept becomes operationalized in programs. But there are so many programs, with an equal or greater amount of instructional methods to those programs, that the original concept becomes more and more muddled.

The concept of 'bilingual education' is a qualification of the concept of 'education'. "Central to the concept of education is the development of knowledge and understanding." (Peters, 1978) So, 'bilingual education' as a special kind of education must also be concerned with knowledge and understanding. But what kind of knowledge and understanding? The presumption is that kind that is associated with school curriculum. Schools are concerned

with education, after all, and curriculum is a vehicle which schools use as part of the educating process.

'Bilingual' means two languages. Can it then be presumed that the theoretical concept of 'bilingual education' simply implies education in two languages? Do the ramifications of the realization that education is operationalized in curriculum in schools imply, then, that the curriculum involved in 'bilingual education' be in two languages? Must there be two curricula, then? Or, at least two? Or can there be one curriculum translated into two languages? What if translations are unavailable?

Traditional curriculum scholars have grappled with these questions in their attempt to operationalize 'bilingual education'. In traditional curriculum theory (Tyler, 1950) a student is conceived of as 'learner' who, as the result of a curricular input, produces anticipated outcomes. In the cases of non or limited English speaking children, however, the curricular input does not produce the intended outcomes. The input is not comprehensible to these children because they do not have the language fluency to understand the curriculum. Language, therefore, is seen as an impediment to education by means of the curricular vehicle.

With the theoretical concept of 'bilingual education' as a base, traditional curriculum researchers found a straightforward way to eliminate the language

impediment. By taking language into account, the input could be modified and thus traditional curriculum methods could lead to anticipated outcomes. That is, non and limited English speaking children could still be conceived of as 'learners' who would follow traditional curriculum methods of input (modified by language) plus treatment to produce intended learning outcomes.

Researchers, clinging to traditional curriculum methods, even modified by concern for language, have not produced a consistent literature which conclusively illustrates that when the theoretical concept of 'bilingual education' is operationalized in "x, y, or z" manner children produce certain intended learning outcomes. Rather, De Avila (1985) contends "the focus of bilingual education should not be on language, but on programming children for success." But Cardenas (1986) tells us "bilingual education with native-language instruction still appears to be the best option for children with limited English proficiency". And Gold (1987) reports that "Spanish speaking students taught primarily in English are outperforming those taught mainly in Spanish, without sacrificing their native skills" in a pilot project in El Paso, Texas. While Gersten (1985) argues "that a structured immersion approach may well be beneficial for language minority students and may be superior to the transitional bilingual model used in most programs in this country". The literature contains many syntheses studies for bilingual

education programs (e.g. Hakuta and Gould, 1986; Willig, 1985; Baker and deKanter, 1981). Each article cites the apparent success of transitional bilingual education, additive bilingualism, subtractive bilingualism, immersion, submersion, concurrent translation, to name a few (Ovando and Collier, 1986).

Practitioners have their choice of methods and programs, but still no clear indication of what 'bilingual education' is--or is supposed to be. Clearly, 'bilingual education' is universally concerned with language and is somehow connected with curriculum, but how concerned and how connected is illusive. One reason for discrepancies in understanding may reflect different kinds of assumptions which ground policymakers, researchers and theoreticians from those which ground practitioners. These assumptions are not mutually exclusive to either group, but policymakers, researchers and theoreticians seem more focused on predictive assumptions whereas practitioners operate on perspective assumptions.

Predictive assumptions are concerned with theoretical 'shoulds'. They are kinds of ideals. Thus, to researchers, children should be able to comprehend a curriculum and thus produce intended learning outcomes. If there is an impediment that nullifies the possibility that the assumption is valid, that impediment should be negated.

By negating the impediment of language, in some way, the anticipated outcome should exist. X should produce Y.

Perspective assumptions, on the other hand, are concerned with what is. A practitioner assumes children are learning something because of a particular curriculum or a particular set of conditions. But there are children in the classroom who are not learning that some thing because they cannot comprehend the curriculum. The teacher assumes they have the ability to learn, but they are not. What can be done so that those children will learn?

Even following traditional curriculum methods of input leading to intended learning outcomes, the practitioner views the students in the classroom in different ways from theorists, policymakers and even researchers. The practitioner relies on her knowledge of student as 'person', not student as 'learner'. By viewing the student as 'person' (see Crane, 1986), a practitioner is able to modify the curricular input in the most meaningful way so that the possibilities of certain intended learning outcomes become more probable. Language, therefore, is not the only modification, as is the presumption in many cases in the literature concerning 'bilingual education'. There are cultural, sociological, psychological and other considerations. In this manner, the practitioner has operationalized 'bilingual education' in a practical way.

The practitioner has not chosen a proscribed method. Rather, experience has lead to the conclusion that the curriculum must be made meaningful to be understood by the non-learner.

At this point, the practitioner clearly differentiates between 'bilingual education' (meaning unclear) and 'bilingual curriculum' (the particular curriculum which must be presented in more than one way to become meaningful to her students). To the practitioner, 'bilingual curriculum' is understandable--it is the curriculum of choice where children do not understand the monolingual curriculum because these children are non or limited English speaking children.

In the field of education, as in other professions, practitioners must inform the policymakers, theoreticians, and researchers of the practical application of policy, theory, and research. There are difficulties with using 'bilingual education' to refer to methods of application as well as a theoretical concept. 'Bilingual education' is a more encompassing term that 'bilginual curriculum'--just as 'education' is broader than 'curriculum'. Not using 'bilingual education' when 'bilingual curriculum' is meant would be a beginning to an elimination of confusion. Why is this distinction so important?

Teachers are trained in theory. They learn educational psychology, history, sociology, philosophy, and politics in addition to their training of subject matter. In most states an attempt is made to practically train teachers by offering some kind of internship called student teaching. But most first year teachers will admit that neither their theoretical training nor internship adequately prepared them to orchestrate a curriculum for upwards of 30 students (at the elementary level). Into this feeling of inadequacy, drop another theoretical concept whose clarity in practice is a whisp--'bilingual education'.

Knowing that there is a distinction between the concept of 'bilingual education' and the application of the concept in 'bilingual curriculum' can help new teachers deal with the realities of classroom life and can inform researchers in their task. 'Bilingual curriculum' is the operationalization (in the many forms available) of the concept of 'bilingual education'. There are many 'bilingual curricula'. The argument rages over which 'bilingual curriculum' is best suited for any non or limited English speaking child (see U.S. Dept. of Education, 1986) and over how these programs should receive funding (see Congressional Digest, 1987). One current argument in the literature (Baker, Willig, Secada, 1987) is that questions concerning the efficacy of 'bilingual education' produce different conclusions because the same question was not addressed in each study. This lends support to the contention in this

paper that the concept must be clarified. No one can truly prove or disprove if "it" works, unless we can be clear about what "it" is. And how can practitioners be informed by research that is so divided?

Practitioners are closer to the 'problem'--if one exists. They daily interact with students as 'persons', not only as 'learners'. Because of this, practitioners are concerned that policymakers, theoreticians, and researchers are out of touch with the realities of the interaction and take too simplistic of a viewpoint to the resolution of the problem. Many factors must be considered in judging which 'bilingual curriculum' should operationalize 'bilingual education' in any case. So rather than compete for "the" best, researchers might serve practitioners better by offering many options when they finally delineate curricular frameworks for 'bilingual education'. And be more clear about what is meant by 'bilingual education'.

Most practitioners want their students to be successful 'learners'. They want to effect the persons in their classroom in some positive way. Most researchers want to effect practice in some positive way. The common goal of researchers and practitioners, then, is the successful education of children. Dialog between the two groups of educators is a way to keep in touch with the common goal. But the dialog in the case of 'bilingual education' is more than just two-way. It also includes policymakers (at

federal, state, and local levels), and theoreticians. With so many interested groups having such varied agendas, it is not surprising that the concept of 'bilingual education becomes so fluid. Yet it is containable through all levels if it is seen as a theoretical concept which is operationalized in a 'bilingual curriculum'. Secada (1987) points out that scholars have a right to "define terms and constructs the way he or she wants, but that a concept has a history and that history should be taken into account." The history of 'bilingual education' displays too many meanings. It is no wonder by the time it filters down to practitioners that many practitioners have negative feelings concerning 'bilingual education'. In fact, one prominent historical connotation of 'bilingual education' to practitioners is that 'bilingual education' = increased paperwork.

In the survey for this paper, nearly all respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement that "Teachers who have non or limited English speaking children spend more time preparing and doing paperwork than those without non or limited English speakers". This may be a reason that teachers often have negative feelings whenever 'bilingual education' is the topic. Those negative feelings do not mean that teachers don't believe in the theoretical concept, but, from their experience, the application of this concept in proscribed ways, leads to the anathema of teaching--more paperwork.

Teachers do believe "A non or limited English speaking child should be given special consideration in the classroom", however. This indicates further that they generally do believe in the ideal of 'bilingual education' but are uncertain how it should be operationalized. In response to two contradictory statements, 1) "Students should (for the most part) be instructed in their native language", and 2) "Students should be instructed only in English", most teachers surveyed indicated strong disagreement with both statements! Does this mean there is another language to a 'bilingual curriculum'? Perhaps it is a method of communication often used by practitioners who do not have a command of the native language--communication using facial expressions and body gestures. That this occurs in a 'bilingual curriculum' is certain and observable. Yet, the literature does not address this form of communication as a viable part of 'bilingual education'.

Disenchantment with the operationalization of a misunderstood concept and inadequate preparation to deal with its ramifications has lead to a shortage of bilingual teachers. Rather than address the inherent problem of clear conceptualization of 'bilingual education' thus eliminating the unknown which leads to fearful misconceptions, states and school districts are each attempting to address the shortage of bilingual teachers with their own educational band aids. In Dallas, "schools with 100 or more LEP student that do not have certified bilingual educators will pair

bilingual and monolingual teachers to teach Spanish and English language-arts lessons. (Gold, 1987). Los Angeles Unified School District also allows a team teaching approach when there are not enough necessary bilingual teachers for the student population (LAUSD, Office of Bilingual-ESL Instruction). These approaches are necessary because many school districts have large number of children who are non or limited English speakers and they do not have a sufficient number of bilingual teachers.

Educators who are other than practitioners often don't remember or realize the subtleties of classroom interaction. Their perspective is that of an "outsider" looking in--well intentioned though they may be. They can observe for a while, but their observation is time-limited They may identify certain interactions and draw conclusions from those interactions, but the conclusions can only be limited to the observations. That is, there is always more to be observed--but it isn't.

By listening to practitioners other educators can begin to understand those other interactions which lead to knowing and understanding--to education. There is more to 'bilingual education' than a theoretical perspective in classrooms across the United States. There is more to 'bilingual education' as a theoretical concept than the way it is operationalized by curriculum traditionalists. There is, primarily, a 'bilingual curriculum' (or more than 'a')

which takes into account 'persons' who are "preproductive, productive, emergent, fluent, or transitional" English speakers. (Genzuk)

There IS a difference between 'bilingual education' and 'bilingual curriculum'. Continued dialog by all educators concerning the differences would make each concept more clear, and ultimately result in more coherent 'bilingual programs' which could aid so many non and limited English speaking children of varied ethnic backgrounds in public schooling in the United States today to become more 'educated'--the goal of all types of education.

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END NOTES

This survey was given to 25 teachers who teach in public schools in the Southern California area. Each of these teachers have bilingual programs in their schools. Some of the teachers are certified bilingual teachers.

Please respond on a continuum from 1 to 5 (1= strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree).

1. A non-English speaking child should be given special consideration in the classroom.

2. A non-English speaking child is given special consideration in the classroom.

3. Non-English speaking children are at an educational disadvantage in the current educational system.

4. Bilingual education means teaching a child in two languages.

5. Bilingual education means teaching a child primarily in the native language of the child.

6. Students should be instructed (for the most part) in their native language.

7. Students should be instructed only in English.

8. All children should learn to function in English as quickly as possible.

9. ESL is the main part of bilingual education.

10. All curriculum (e.g. Math, science, language arts, etc.) should be taught in two languages in a bilingual classroom.

11. All curriculum is taught in two languages in such a classroom.

12. Teachers who have non-English speaking children in their classroom spend more time preparing and doing paperwork than those without non-English speakers.

13. In a bilingual classroom English speaking children learn to speak a language other than English.

14. There is a difference between 'bilingual education' and 'bilingual curriculum'.

15. What does 'bilingual education' mean to you.

Other than questions cited in the text of this paper, responses showed no particular trend. Admittedly the sample is small and there was no attempt to be "random". Rather, whoever was available was asked to participate.